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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001636

SIPDIS

AID FOR DCHA/FFP LANDIS, CRUMBLY, MUTAMBA,  
PETERSEN  
DCHA/OFDA FOR KHANDAGLE, ETTI, MARX, HALMRAST-  
SANCHEZ  
AFR/SA FOR FLEURET, LOKEN, COPSON, MACNAIRN  
STATE/AF FOR NEULING  
BRUSSELS FOR PATRICIA LERNER  
PRETORIA FOR, DISKIN, HALE, SINK, REYNOLDS  
NAIROBI FOR SMITH, BROWN  
GABORONE FOR CASHION, BROWN  
ROME FOR FODAG FOR GAST

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: IS GOZ PLANNING TO DOUBLE MAIZE PRODUCTION  
THIS COMING YEAR?

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Summary  
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1. For the 2004/2005 agricultural season the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) seems to be planning for a substantial increase in maize (corn) production above its claimed 2.4 million MT for the recent harvest. Seed companies reported to USAID General Development Officer that the Government requested them to supply 75 000 MT of maize seed, which would be enough to plant 3 million hectares (the resulting yield would depend on various factors, such as rain and access to fertilizer). Zimbabwe's largest maize harvest, planted on 1.6 million hectares in 1996, required 40,000 MT of seed.

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Seed Requirements  
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2. Current unsubstantiated estimates by government put the amount of locally available maize seed at 55,000 MT. However, the seed companies can confirm the availability of only 45,000 MT in-country, and speculate that the additional reported 10,000 MT may represent production from Government seed farms and seed leftover from last year's purchases. During the 1990s, an average of 36,000 MT of maize seed was used per year. Depending on the final availability of local seed, at least 20,000 MT of maize seed would need to be imported to reach the 75,000 MT the GOZ says it requires. The estimated cost of procuring 55,000 MT of maize locally would be the equivalent of around 60 million USD, with another 20 million USD needed to import the additional 20,000 MT of maize seed.

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Seed Price Negotiations, Seed Availability  
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3. Negotiations between government and seed companies over price are still ongoing. As a result, seed maize is not readily available on the market. If the government follows through with its request for 75,000 MT of maize seed there will be very little maize seed available on the retail market for Zimbabwean farmers to purchase. Seed companies plan to allocate most of their stocks for sale to the government, leaving only small amounts of seed for retailers.

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Seed Distribution  
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4. How the GOZ plans to deliver so much maize seed in Zimbabwe remains a mystery. The GOZ will likely distribute the maize seed to the new resettlement areas where the land is considered the most productive. However, many farmers in these areas would prefer to plant a crop whose price is not controlled by the government. Distribution of seed to the communal farmers through GOZ channels, rather than by private dealers, would pose logistic problems. Vulnerable households who lack funds, draft power and transportation to GOZ seed distribution points may not benefit much from this massive seed infusion.

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Conclusion  
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15. The GOZ continues to insist that it does not need food aid and appears to be taking steps to ensure that this statement becomes reality, and not just rhetoric. If the government secures at least 50,000 MT of maize seed, which is a possibility, and if that amount is effectively distributed and planted under normal conditions with an average yield of .8 MT per hectare, it would produce a maize harvest of 1.6 million MT. If these assumptions bear out, there would be enough domestic production of maize for the 2005 harvest to meet the country's food needs. Lack of transparency on the part of GOZ, however, leaves donors guessing as to the intended plans for the seed and given the number of things that could go wrong in this equation, the GOZ's luck will have to be very good indeed to reach these figures. DELL